10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

291 roomy so that a man could squat down and pull his knees up inside the garment. Sometimes it was folded around the loins as its wearer squatted on the ground or mat. On cold mornings extra warmth was obtained by wrapping a blanket round the body, either a thick one of the same hand-woven cotton, or one of wool bought from some bazaar.

In the Toungoo Hills, the Bwè and other tribes usually wore a shorter smock, with all kinds and variations of stripes, which would hardly reach to their knees. They covered their legs with baggy Shan "bombies" or pants, usually black in colour.

291 For a number of years the Karens on the plains and
177 in the towns have worn the usual Burmese dress consisting of a *longyi* (skirt) with a white jacket in the warm weather and dark thick imported clothing in the cold.

• 562 The usual dress for the women has been the *longyi*,
291 worn over the lower part of the body and a shorter *hsay*
286 or smock over the upper part. The former was woven by the women themselves but the latter was often of imported cloth, usually black. Sometimes black velvet was used for the smock. Among the Sgaws the finest smocks were made of homespun black or dark blue cloth and were trimmed with rows of Job's Tears, the white seeds that grow readily in their plantations. Otherwise, bits of blue or red ribbon or strips of cloth were used for
301 ornaments. Often many strings of beads were wrapped
751 about the neck, some of which were supposed to have magical value to ward off evil spirits.

586 The women of the villages near Thandaung among
291 the Bwès, or Mopghas as they call themselves, wove very
178 elaborate skirts in which a number of colours were beauti-

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10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
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586 291 178 fully blended together, but the weaving of these skirts was almost a lost art at the time of the invasion.

291 855 562 Little children were wrapped in blankets or in garments that were cast off by their elders. When romping boys began to run around they did not bother with clothes until they were five or six, or even older. Little girls usually began to wrap a small *longyi* about their waists at three or four. Elders often went about with scant loin cloths, but very seldom did they appear without any clothing.

291 177 With the rise of national self-consciousness, the Karens tried an adaptation of their national dress and, finding the old smock ill-adapted to modern conditions, they invented a jacket cut after the style of the ordinary European lounge jacket made of the native cloth and embroidered with some of the designs of the original smocks. There were many patterns of these and they became very popular among the younger men in the cities and towns and among older boys in schools. They were a sort of blazer such as is worn in schools in Europe or [562] America. A few Karens adopted the European style of men's dress, but few women in the cities wore anything except the usual Burmese costume.

291 184 562 773 Among the Bwès and Pakus, another tribe near Toungoo, the women all wore skirts of an identical pattern. This had a black ground with two or three narrow horizontal stripes at about the height of the knees. But among the Sgaws there was a large number of patterns. The most common was a conventional design of horizontal stripes of various shades of red and in the middle a "python skin" in clouded pattern. This commemorated the old myth of the woman who was stolen by the

10: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1945 AP1 Burma
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legendary white python and who was released only by the sacrifice of her husband. On her release she wove the pattern of the python's skin into her skirt thus offering him the greatest insult that she knew. (This incident is related in the story of "Ku Law Lay and Naw Mu Eh".)

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Karen female costume

Bathing is an important item of comfort in a hot country, being not so much for cleanliness as for coolness. In the hills where the water is icy cold as it comes from the mountain springs, and where often the village is located far above the water streams, bathing is not indulged in to any great extent. Nor do Karens mind dirty clothes, for they know that much washing wears them out, as they have to depend upon rubbing and pounding rather than upon soap. In the seclusion of the mountain forests they often play about in the water without clothes. On the plains, where bathing is more common either in the open rivers or at the village well, they

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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usage, but they are somewhat puzzled by new situations and in such cases are apt to give themselves the benefit of the doubt. Stealing, such as appropriating paddy from a bin or leading off another's ox or taking somebody's money, is severely dealt with among the Karen. But carrying away a small trinket that takes the eye, either with or without the owner's permission, is not considered important enough to be noticed.

THE WOMEN

Among races less advanced than the Karen the attention of the men is almost entirely taken up with warfare and hunting, while the work about the house and village is left to the women. The Karen have not progressed far enough beyond primitive conditions for the men to assume all the burdens of the home life that properly fall to the stronger sex. The men still feel their superiority and remain idle, while the women do work too heavy for them. Even apart from the care of the children, the women bear the heavy end of the burden. They are, to be sure, accepted as necessary and useful members of the family, but, none the less, the men consider themselves dishonored if brought into close contact with a woman's garment or compelled to appear in any way subordinate to a female. They will not, or would not in the olden days, go under a house, lest they should have to pass under a woman. In this respect they entertain feelings similar to those of Burmese men.

As housekeeper the Karen woman's work is by no means confined within the irregular partitions of her living-room or house. She draws the water, which means in the hills that she must descend to the stream and carry up the family supply in bamboo joints hung by strings across her head. She has been trained to do this from the time she was so small that she could only struggle up the hillside with one undersized bamboo at her side. Usually she has her little girls' help in this daily task. (See p. 140.) She must pound and winnow the paddy, polish it in a mortar, wash it, and prepare the meals. Either she brings in fagots of wood and splits it, or the young women fetch bundles of dry bamboo upon their heads and stack them near the ladder of the house. (See p. 132.) She is as skilled in the use of the "dah" (long knife) as her husband. When the meal is cooked she sets it out, if she follows the old custom, on a wide wooden tray or, if she has adopted new ways,

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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on a low table. The pile of rice on the tray looks like a heap of snow. The curries or condiments are placed beside the tray in small cups. The members of the family usually eat together. If there are guests the women often wait, either to serve in case the supply needs replenishing, or because they are shy about eating with strangers.

In addition to attending to their domestic cares, the women take their place beside the men in the fields. It should not be forgotten, however, that the latter can cook and perform the work usually assigned to women more readily than men in the West can. In the field the women and girls assist in the sowing, planting, and transplanting of rice on the plains, as well as in the reaping, threshing, etc., doing their full share along with the men. They tend the cotton and vegetables and carry the greater part of the paddy to the storage-bins and from these to their homes. The only work I have seen men doing that I have never observed being done by women is plowing.

The women mingle in the village gatherings and take part in the wedding and funeral festivities, their share in the latter being specially prominent.[2] Their position in their own families depends largely on their personal character. If they possess strong personalities, they gain considerable prestige and exercise influence accordingly. The older they grow the more conservative they become, and not infrequently the opinions of a grandmother will keep a whole family from bettering its condition by engaging in some new occupation. The Karen grandmother holds the first place in the family at the "Bgha" feast, when all of the members are gathered together. She is then the "Bgha a' hko." This peculiar position of hers has been discussed in the chapter on Feasts to the "Bgha."[3] Its religious significance is remarkable and may be a relic of matriarchal government, which is still found in Tibet. But it does not appear to have any effect on the social position of the sex, except in so far as it prevents the younger members of the family, both men and women, from breaking with the religious and social traditions of their forefathers.

In the olden days three classes of people were condemned "to live without the camp." These were cohabiting couples who had not complied with the marriage rites, widows, and orphans. A couple whose union had been formed without the performance and

[2] See Chapter XX, p. 202.
[3] See Chapter XXIV, pp. 248, 249.

19; Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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585 bits of red and yellow wool or by beads. The women wore heavily
292 beaded smocks above their richly colored skirts, numerous chains of silver and glass beads, and red and white turbans. Meanwhile, the horns were emitting alternate short and long tones of reedy timbre. When the guests began to gather at the foot of the ladder, a boy was there with a jar of water from which he sprinkled the feet of each one as he ascended into the house. Shouts of "traw le-o, traw le-o" mingled with the notes of the horns as the groom advanced to the doorway of his bride's parents. Here he was met by two young men, neither of whom had lost a parent (such is the requirement of the occasion), who poured the contents of two bamboo water joints over him, completely drenching him. They then assisted him to don the new garments provided for him by his betrothed.[6] The din produced by the merry-makers by no means ceased when they had entered the house. Indeed, it only seemed to increase, being punctuated now and then with a shout which served as a signal for the crowd to jump up and down on the plain bamboo floor, shaking the whole building until it seemed ready to collapse.

585 Meanwhile, the bride had long since retired into obscurity in a rear room. Any glimpse of her called forth all the noise the crowd was capable of. In Karen weddings, as in most Oriental nuptials, the bride keeps herself in the background as much as possible. I once asked to see the bride at a wedding on the plains and was told that she was back in the darkest part of the room. I remember that I gazed intently, but was not able to discern her.

The groom in his wedding-array occupied himself in cutting in two-yard lengths a long piece of white muslin and distributing these for turbans to the male relatives of the bride. On request the chief of the village permitted the young men to visit the different rooms of the village-house, for the purpose of merry-making under such restrictions as he saw fit to impose. After that they quieted down for the remainder of the day, spending most of their time in chewing betel, telling stories, and amusing themselves in other ways. Many of them went apart into a room to sleep, having had little rest the night before.

● [562] When a wedding is about to take place in a village nearly all the young women of the place disappear, leaving the day before the event for a visit to another village or retiring into the jungle. The

[6] Dr. Mason tells us that it was the custom for the bride to be conducted to the groom's house and to be there drenched with water: *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1866.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
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[562] 585

bolder ones may remain, but spend their time under the houses or in the deeper shadows.

After darkness has come on and the party has finished the evening meal, the young men make the round of the village, hunting for any of the girls who have had the temerity to remain. Those who are caught are subjected to good-natured badgering and perhaps to pretended abduction. Shouting, the noise of the instruments, and the slaps on the floor and sides of the house with bamboos split at one end into six or eight strips, accompany this hunt for the maidens. Such sport does not degenerate into ill-treatment of the girls, if they are caught, even though the men have indulged in liquor; but the fun is certain to be kept up all night, and sometimes the scant partitions between the living-rooms of the village families are removed, with the permission of the chief, to enable the visitors to circulate the more freely throughout the village-house.

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Among the Shwegin Karen a vestige of wife-purchase appears to have survived. I am told that as night comes on the intermediary and the visiting elders place a jacket and skirt on a winnowing-tray and carry them to the parents of the bride as "ta k'ner" or "things that will win." The local elders, who are present with the parents, decline to accept the garments as being of too little value. The intermediary retires to return with some added articles—a headdress, bracelets, and beads. The parents and village elders are not yet satisfied, and the intermediary has to add a silver head-band, earrings, and a lump of silver to the things on his tray, before he is regarded as offering a sufficient price. A bottle of liquor is now brought out and drunk by way of sealing the bargain, and the village elders announce that "the price is paid." Among these same people it is customary for the elders, on the morning of the second day of the wedding-feasts, to send the bridegroom and his young men out on a hunt. The game taken must be brought back by the groom on his own shoulders and carried by him to the house of the bride. This hunt is his last with his fellows and his first foraging expedition for the household he is establishing.

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On the last evening of the feasts a ceremony used to be performed that is rarely seen nowadays. I have been informed that it was the main part of the marriage-feasts, signifying the uniting of husband and wife. Its name was "Hpo nya mo, hpo nya pa," and meant "Children tease mother; children tease father." For this ceremony the bride prepared a cock and a hen, which were boiled whole, and she also cooked a pot of rice. These were placed in the

19: Marshall M-S (ca. 1910) 1922 APS Burma
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B. The Bwe Sacrifice

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The Sgaw offer their great sacrifice in January.[4] The Bwe, however, make their offering in July when the paddy is well started. They sacrifice one hog in a central spot of the village lands, first erecting a booth under a eugenia tree, which they consider sacred. Four elders act as priests, their functions being herediatary.[5] Each man cuts three bamboos, one to represent a post of his paddy-bin and the other two to show the height he wants the grain to be in his bin. Then he makes a miniature bin, a long pen, a trap, and a snare. When the people assemble, only the most prosperous elders sit with the priests in the booth. No women are allowed to be present. [562]

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The leader takes a sprig from a eugenia tree and raises it in his clasped hand to heaven and prays, the others doing likewise. The leader then spears the hog; and, when the blood flows, all seize their bamboos and cry out: "May my paddy be as high as these bamboos." Some declare that they have caught many rats in their traps and others that they have snared many wild fowls, in proof of their purpose to protect the growing grain. Others dance and shout, while some beat gongs or blow bamboo pipes.

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The hog is then carried to the village to be cooked. Each man also provides a fowl. When all the food has been prepared, it is brought back to the booth; and, after a prayer much like that quoted above, they set out the food but eat none of it. On their way back to the village they dance and sing and spend the night in revelry. Next morning they return to the booth, and the priests begin to eat of the food left there, all being allowed to partake; but any one who considers himself unholy must not eat, for the food is sacred. Not only persons guilty of immoral conduct, but also men whose wives are pregnant are under tabu.

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After the feast, when they have again danced their way back to the village, the chiefs draw two joints of water for each family and carry them into the village. The families are then called out on their verandas and each family group, including the women and children, is sprinkled with water from one of the joints brought for it. The other is carried to the field next morning by the head of

[4] So far as I have been able to ascertain, it seems to have been many years since one of these great sacrifices has been observed by the Sgaw Karen of Lower Burma. I have been able to get no contemporary accounts of such a ceremony. As to the length of time since the Bwe have held such a sacrifice, I can give no definite information.

[5] See p. 247 on priests among the Bwe.

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CHAPTER XXIV

FEASTS TO THE "BGHA"

The Ceremonial of the Feasts

776 782 "Mü xa do" (the great "Mü xa" or king of the "Mü xa") is the demon most intimately connected with the affairs of men. He may serve as their guardian and protector if properly propitiated with offerings; but he is more often feared as the author of all kinds of evil. Some Karens, especially in Shwegyin, regard him as a household deity to whom the family offer their sacrifices called "ta aw Bgha" (to eat the "Bgha"). He is addressed as "Thi Hko Mü Xa," and is evidently regarded as the lord of demons.[1] In most parts of the Sgaw Karen country, however, the "Bgha" is mentioned as being distinct from "Mü xa do" and, in a special way, as the tutelary god of the family by whom it is reverenced and feared. It is supposed to subsist upon the "k'las" or shades of the members of the family, if it is not provided generously with pork and chicken; and even then the family's immunity may not be assured. In their prayers and offerings the people sometimes associate the "T'reh t' hka" with the "Bgha," the former having, as I understand it, no connection with the family. Perhaps this is a precaution taken in the hope of appeasing whichever spirit may be responsible for the misfortune they are trying to alleviate.

769 A veneration of ancestors is manifest all through the family ceremonies treated in this chapter. The ancestors are thought of as taking an interest, although not always a friendly one, in the affairs of living men. The Karen do not, however, indulge in ancestor worship to the extent that the Chinese practice it.

776 The family "Bghas" are said to be eternal. As new unions take place and households are set up generation by generation, each family finds itself provided with a "Bgha" of its own. But what the relation of the new crop of "Bghas" is to that of the preceding generation, no one is able to explain.

887 611 562 The grandmother or the eldest female in the direct line of the family presides as the high priestess at the "Bgha" feast of the

[1] Dr. Wade in The Karen Thesaurus, new ed., Vol. I., p. 488.

19: Marshall M-6 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

whole family. She is the "Bgha a' hko." This custom seems to hark back to the matriarchal stage of development among the Karen, as also does the fact that the groom goes to live with the bride's family. Why a woman should hold the place of honor at the "Bgha" feast has been "explained" to me in two ways, namely, (1) that a female was the first person to fall under the influence of "Mū kaw li" (Satan) in the orchard, and (2) that as the woman is the more susceptible to sickness, she properly has more to do with the offerings and should take the leading part in making them. The Karen maintain that the elders are responsible for these explanations and that the ceremonial of the "Bgha" feast has come down from time immemorial.

There are three kinds of "Bgha" feasts. The most familiar kind is that observed by the members of the immediate family when one of their number has fallen sick, in case divination shows that his illness is due to his having offended the "Bgha." In such a case the family must at once join in a feast. The second kind of feast is that observed as a preventive of possible sickness and as a means of keeping on good terms with the "Bgha." This is known as "ta aw bwaw a' tha" (eating to strengthen one's heart). The third kind of feast is that participated in by all the kindred, when the most elaborate rites are celebrated. Such a feast is called "ta aw saw ke saw na." While there is a general resemblance among the feasts held all over the Karen country, the various tribes and even parts of the same tribe differ in the details of their observances.

In the case of an illness found by divination to be due to the "Bgha," the ceremonial of the feast among the Sgaw Karen of the Tharrawaddy district and in the Pegū Hills, is as follows: After a pot of rice has been set on the fire to boil, a fowl is caught and killed, and its feathers are burned off in the fireplace. It is then cut up and cooked with salt and a chili and placed on the table or family tray. The father, mother, and children in the order of their ages severally partake of a morsel, after which they eat their meal together. If the parents of the father and mother are living, the feast is held in the morning; but if they are dead, it is held in the afternoon. On the following morning a pig is caught, brought into the house, and its legs are tied together. It is then killed by strangulation or by wrenching the neck, care being taken not to break any of its bones or bruise its skin lest some of its blood should be spilled. The body of the pig is then run through lengthwise on

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AF1 Burma
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784 of child-bearing to other members of the village. MacMahon states
844 that the Bwe husband of a newly delivered mother complies with
846 the custom of cutting fresh bamboo joints, in which he draws and heats the water for bathing the infant, over a fire kindled by himself in the open. He then carries the water to his wife's room up a new ladder, which he has made. After his wife has washed the child or he himself, in case she is too weak to do so, he hangs the bamboo joints under the house and leaves them there for six days before they may be used again.[6] On the day of the birth of a child, or even of a domestic animal, members of the village are forbidden to work. This is the tabu of births ("ta dū ta ble").

784 In the early times widows and orphans, as well as persons
626 found to be holding improper relations, became tabu and were expelled from the village, in order to keep other inhabitants from falling under the vengeance of the evil-working demon, whose attention might be diverted from his first victims. The driving of these unfortunates into the jungle to live there by themselves, may be described as a kind of primitive quarantine.[6] Precaution of a
[609 574] different kind was at the bottom of the requirement that a visiting stranger should enter and leave the village-house by the same ladder. It was also required that the visitor must descend the ladder while facing inwards. Leaving the house by a different way from that by which one had entered, created suspicion of hostile
784 intent among the inhabitants and might lead to hostilities. Like
● 562 other neighboring peoples, the Karen observe a tabu in regard to women's garments, which must not come in contact with a man. Garments that are put out to dry must be hung away from the common paths in some inconspicuous place. Probably this custom originated in the fear that the supposed weakness of woman might be communicated to the men. For the same reason, evidently, the Brec tribe prohibits married men from taking part in making the coffin for a woman who has died in child-birth.

787 Tabus connected with portents, such as eclipses of the moon,
784 earthquakes, the cries of apes, and certain strange sounds in the jungle, have a religious significance for the Karen and are accompanied by the prohibition of work for one or more days. The witnesses of these portents are seized with fear, drop their work, and stand about in helplessness. This, undoubtedly, is the normal behavior of primitive people under such circumstances. They as-

[6] MacMahon, *The Karens of the Golden Chersonese*, p. 218.
[6] See Chapter XIV on Social Conditions, pp. 193, 194.

25; Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Karen AP7

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343. KAREN SPRING-SPEAR (DYAN)

making traps and snares for animals, whose habits they observe closely, and whose calls they mimic. Squirrels are their principal quarry. For deer they set a spring-spear called *dyan* at a salt-lick. This is a source of danger to travellers, who have to be on their guard for the warning sign set at the approaches to the *dyan*. They keep common wild cocks and pheasant cocks, as well as doves, for decoys. The decoy-cock is tied by the leg to a post in the centre of a circle of snares; when a wild bird hears him crow and comes to fight he is caught. [857] The chief game of Karén children is transfixing bamboo hoops as they bound past, a practice for spearing running game. The Karéns use a cross-bow [411] (No. 204), with simple, and occasionally also with poisoned arrows. All the [412] Karén utensils are of home manufacture, with the significant exception of the *dâ* and axe, their chief implements, which are made by Shans and Burmans. [439] They even make rough pottery when at a distance from the market. The women spin, dye, and weave their own yarn; but they are beginning to use the [286] ready-dyed yarn that is imported. Every member of a Karén household labours for the common fund. Young Karéns do not marry till mature—585 twenty to twenty-four. Marriages are arranged by the elders; but, if a pair mate of their own choice, the lad has to give a buffalo or its value to the girl's parents. Unlike the marriages of the civilised races of the country, the Karén marriage is a great festivity. 291 Karén unmarried women wear only a [562] long smock (*thindding*) [224] of plain white. Married women wear a blue embroidered smock over a figured loin-000 cloth. Men and women

344. KAREN HUNTERS BRINGING IN WILD PIG